

Michaud Pushes for Action on Assistance for Workers Hurt by Trade

Thursday, May 19 2011

162 members of Congress sign letter to Obama calling for immediate action

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Mike Michaud is sending a letter signed by 162 members of Congress to President Obama expressing their support for the immediate enactment of a five year reauthorization of the 2009 Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) reforms. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, since May 2009, 3,678 Mainers were certified for assistance under TAA.

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WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Congressman Mike Michaud is sending a letter signed by 162 members of Congress to President Obama expressing their support for the immediate enactment of a five year reauthorization of the 2009 Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) reforms. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, since May 2009, 3,678 Mainers were certified for assistance under TAA.

“This critical program has helped over 430,000 workers across our country over the past two years,” said Michaud, Chairman of the House Trade Working Group. “We must reauthorize TAA as soon as possible, including all of the 2009 improvements. I appreciate that the White House has offered its tentative support for this, especially given our high unemployment rate and the strong likelihood that it will send Congress three more NAFTA-style trade deals that will cost more U.S. jobs. At the end of the day, the best assistance that we can offer to workers dislocated by trade is a new trade model that doesn’t send their jobs overseas in the first place.”

The 2009 TAA reforms dramatically improved the TAA for Workers program. Specifically, the legislation made service sector workers eligible for the program, expanded access for manufacturing workers, significantly increased training funding and promoted on-the-job, part-time and longer-term training. Since the reforms were implemented in May 2009, more than 185,000 additional trade-impacted workers who may not have been certified under the “old” 2002 TAA for Workers program have become eligible for training opportunities and benefits. In total, more than 435,000 workers were certified as eligible for TAA support in that timeframe.

The text of the letter that is being sent to the White House today can be found below. Michaud worked with Representatives Jim McDermott, John Lewis, Xavier Becerra, and Adam Smith to gather the 162 signatures on the letter. In addition to the letter below, Michaud also led a letter signed by 75 of his colleagues that was sent yesterday to the House Appropriations Committee requesting that funding be maintained for the TAA for Firms program, which ensures that small and medium-sized American businesses negatively impacted by foreign trade are able to obtain the technical assistance they need to remain viable.

May 19, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama

President of the United States

The White House

Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our strong support for the immediate enactment of a five year reauthorization of the 2009 Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) reforms.

The Trade Expansion Act of 1962 created the Trade Adjustment Assistance program to assist workers laid off as a result of international trade by helping them retrain and acquire skills needed to compete in the global environment. In 2009, Congress enacted the Trade and Globalization Adjustment Assistance Act of 2009, making significant improvements to the TAA for Workers program as well as the other TAA programs — Firms, Farmers, and Communities.

The 2009 reforms had the full support of the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Committee on Ways and Means and the Senate Finance Committee. Underscoring the bipartisanship, bicameral support for the 2009 reforms, Congressman Camp, who was then the Ranking Member of the House Committee on Ways and Means stated, “this important package provides a coherent, rational, accountable, and cost-effective system for training trade-affected workers and putting them back to work quickly and at better jobs”. Similarly, Senator Grassley, the Ranking Member on the Senate Finance Committee stated, “today’s achievement is the culmination of years of effort, and I am confident that the result will serve to benefit American workers in Iowa and across the United States for years to come”.

The 2009 TAA reforms dramatically improved the TAA for Workers program. Specifically, the legislation made service sector workers eligible for the program, expanded access for manufacturing workers, significantly increased training funding and promoted on-the-job, part-time and longer-term training. Critically, it also increased the TAA for Workers Health Coverage Tax Credit subsidy to 80 percent and made several important changes to the existing credit. These changes were designed to minimize gaps in coverage and assure access to insurance policies that meet the health and medical needs of eligible individuals and their families. The 2009 legislation also made important reforms to the TAA for Firms program and tripled its authorization, improved the TAA for Farmers program, and created the TAA for Communities program.

Since the reforms were implemented in May 2009, more than 185,000 additional trade-impacted workers who may not have been certified under the “old” 2002 TAA for Workers program have become eligible for training opportunities and benefits. In total, more than 435,000 workers were certified as eligible for TAA support in that timeframe. In FY2010 alone, more than 227,000 workers took advantage of TAA and participated in the program, receiving case management, training and/or income support.

The 2009 TAA reforms expired on February 12, 2011, and just last week, the Department of Labor denied the first three petitions filed by groups of workers seeking TAA assistance under pre-2009 TAA rules. The reason for the denial: they were service workers, and now that the 2009 reforms have lapsed, service workers are not eligible for TAA. Inevitably, the inability of these laid off workers to obtain TAA support and training, as well as the more limited benefits available to those workers whose TAA petitions are approved, will impede their efforts to obtain new jobs in growth sectors like health, information technology and precision manufacturing and contribute to the economic recovery.

The denial of these service workers’ petitions for TAA assistance demonstrates the real consequences for working families associated with the failure to reauthorize TAA. The 2009 program should never have been allowed to lapse, and it is imperative that it is re-started immediately before additional workers are harmed. We therefore support the immediate passage of a five-year reauthorization of the 2009 TAA reforms and look forward to working with the Administration to accomplish this goal

Sincerely,

MIKE MICHAUD

Member of Congress

JIM MCDERMOTT

Member of Congress

JOHN LEWIS

Member of Congress

XAVIER BECERRA

Member of Congress

ADAM SMITH

Member of Congress

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